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INTERPRETATION OF SAVAGE MIND.

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The psychical attitudes and traits of the savage are more than stages through which mind has passed, leaving them behind. They are outgrowths which have entered decisively into further evolution, and as such form an integral part of the framework of present mental organization. Such positive significance is commonly attributed, in theory at least, to animal mind; but the mental structure of the savage, which presumably has an even greater relevancy for genetic psychology, is strangely neglected.

The cause of this neglect I believe lies in the scant results so far secured, because of the abuse of the comparative method—which abuse in turn is due to the lack of a proper method of interpretation. Comparison as currently employed is defective—even perverse—in at least three respects. In the first place, it is used indiscriminately and arbitrarily. Facts are torn loose from their context in social and natural environment and heaped miscellaneously together, because they have impressed the observer as alike in some respect. Upon a single page of Spencer,¹ which I chanced to open in looking for an illustration of this point, appear Kamschadales, Kirghiz, Bedouins, East Africans, Bechuanas, Damaras, Hottentots, Malays, Papuans, Fijians, Andamanese—all cited in reference to establishing a certain common property of primitive minds. What would we think of a biologist who appealed successively to some external charac-

¹ 'Sociology,' I., p. 57.

teristic of say snake, butterfly, elephant, oyster and robin in support of a statement? And yet the peoples mentioned present widely remote cultural resources, varied environments and distinctive institutions. What is the scientific value of a proposition thus arrived at?

In the second place, this haphazard, uncontrollable selection yields only static facts—facts which lack the dynamic quality necessary to a genetic consideration. The following is a summary of Mr. Spencer's characterizations of primitive man, emotional and intellectual :

He is explosive and chaotic in feeling, improvident, childishly mirthful, intolerant of restraint, with but small flow of altruistic feeling,¹ attentive to meaningless detail and incapable of selecting the facts from which conclusions may be drawn, with feeble grasp of thought, incapable of rational surprise, incurious, lacking in ingenuity and constructive imagination.² Even the one quality which is stated positively, namely, keenness of perception, is interpreted in a purely negative way, as a character antagonistic to reflective development. "In proportion as the mental energies go out in restless perception, they cannot go out in deliberate thought."³ And this from a sensationalist in psychology!

Such descriptions as these also bear out my first point. Mr. Spencer himself admits frequent and marked discrepancies (*c. g.*, pp. 56, 59, 62, 65, etc.), and it would not be difficult to bring together a considerable mass of proof-texts to support the exact opposite of each of his assertions. But my point here is that present civilized mind is virtually taken as a standard, and savage mind is measured off on this fixed scale.

It is no wonder that the outcome is negative; that primitive mind is described in terms of 'lack,' 'absence': its traits are incapacities. Qualities defined in such fashion are surely useless in suggesting, to say nothing of determining, progress, and are correspondingly infertile for genetic psychology, which is interested in becoming, growth, development.

¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 59, 60, 63, 69, 71.

² *Ibid.*, pp. 79, 82, 85-87.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

The third remark is that the results thus reached, even passing them as correct, yield only loose aggregates of unrelated traits—not a coherent scheme of mind. We do not escape from an inorganic conglomerate conception of mind by just abusing the ‘faculty’ psychology. Our standpoint must be more positive. We must recognize that mind has a pattern, a scheme of arrangement in its constituent elements, and that it is the business of a serious comparative psychology to exhibit these patterns, forms or types in detail. By such terms, I do not mean anything metaphysical; I mean to indicate the necessity of a conception such as is a commonplace with the zoölogist. Terms like articulate or vertebrate, carnivor or herbivor, are ‘pattern’ terms of the sort intended. They imply that an animal is something more than a random composite of isolated parts, made by taking an eye here, an ear there, a set of teeth somewhere else. They signify that the constituent elements are arranged in a certain way; that in being co-adapted to the dominant functions of the organism they are of necessity co-related with one another. Genetic psychology of mind will advance only as it discovers and specifies generic forms or patterns of this sort in psychic morphology.

It is a method for the determination of such types that I wish to suggest in this paper. The biological point of view commits us to the conviction that mind, whatever else it may be, is at least an organ of service for the control of environment in relation to the ends of the life process.

If we search in any social group for the special functions to which mind is thus relative, occupations at once suggest themselves.¹ Occupations determine the fundamental modes of activity, and hence control the formation and use of habits. These habits, in turn, are something more than practical and overt. ‘Apperceptive masses’ and associational tracts of necessity conform to the dominant activities. The occupations determine the chief modes of satisfaction, the standards of suc-

¹ We might almost say, in the converse direction, that biological genera are ‘occupational’ classifications. They connote different ways of getting a living with the different instrumentalities (organs) appropriate to them, and the different associative relations set up by them.

cess and failure. Hence they furnish the working classifications and definitions of value; they control the desire processes. Moreover, they decide the sets of objects and relations that are important, and thereby provide the content or material of attention, and the qualities that are interestingly significant. The directions given to mental life thereby extend to emotional and intellectual characteristics. So fundamental and pervasive is the group of occupational activities that it affords the scheme or pattern of the structural organization of mental traits. Occupations integrate special elements into a functioning whole.

Because the hunting life differs from, say, the agricultural, in the sort of satisfactions and ends it furnishes, in the objects to which it requires attention, in the problems it sets for reflection and deliberation, as well as in the psycho-physic coordinations it stimulates and selects, we may well speak, and without metaphor, of the hunting psychosis or mental type. And so of the pastoral, the military, the trading, the manually productive (or manufacturing) occupations and so on. As a specific illustration of the standpoint and method, I shall take the hunting vocation, and that as carried on by the Australian aborigines. I shall try first to describe its chief distinguishing marks; and then to show how the mental pattern developed is carried over into various activities, customs and products, which on their face have nothing to do with the hunting life. If a controlling influence of this sort can be made out—if it can be shown that art, war, marriage, etc., tend to be psychologically assimilated to the pattern developed in the hunting vocation, we shall thereby get an important method for the interpretation of social institutions and cultural resources—a psychological method for sociology.

The Australian lives in an environment upon the whole benign, without intense or violent unfavorable exhibition of natural forces (save in alternations of drought and flood in some portions), not made dangerous by beasts of prey, and with a sufficient supply of food to maintain small groups in a good state of nutrition though not abundant enough to do this without continual change of abode. The tribes had no cultivated plants, no

domesticated animals (save the dingo dog), hence no beasts of burden, and no knowledge or use of metals.¹

Now as to the psychic pattern formed under such circumstances. How are the sensory-motor coördinations common to all men organized, how stimulated and inhibited into relatively permanent psychic habits, through the activities appropriate to such a situation?

By the nature of the case, food and sex stimuli are the most exigent of all excitants to psycho-physic activity, and the interests connected with them are the most intense and persistent. But with civilized man, all sorts of intermediate terms come in between the stimulus and the overt act, and between the overt act and the final satisfaction. Man no longer defines his end to be the satisfaction of hunger as such. It is so complicated and loaded with all kinds of technical activities, associations, deliberations and social divisions of labor, that conscious attention and interest are in the process and its content. Even in the crudest agriculture, means are developed to the point where they demand attention on their own account, and control the formation and use of habits to such an extent that they are the central interests, while the food process and enjoyment as such is incidental and occasional.

The gathering and saving of seed, preparing the ground, sowing, tending, weeding, care of cattle, making of improvements, continued observation of times and seasons engage thought and direct action. In a word, in all post-hunting situations the end is mentally apprehended and appreciated not as food satisfaction, but as a continuously ordered series of activities and of objective contents pertaining to them. And hence the direct and personal display of energy, personal putting forth of effort, personal acquisition and use of skill are not conceived

¹All these points are important, for the general hunting psychosis exhibits marked differentiations when developed in relation to ferocious beasts; in relation to a very sparse or very abundant food supply; in relation to violently hostile natural forces; and when hunting is pursued in connection with various degrees of agriculture or domesticated herds or flocks. For economy of space, I have omitted reference to the few portions of Australia where the food supply (generally fish in such circumstances) is sufficiently abundant to permit quasi-permanent abodes, though the psychological variations thus induced are interesting.

or felt as immediate parts of the food process. But the exact contrary is the case in hunting. There are no intermediate appliances, no adjustment of means to remote ends, no postponements of satisfaction, no transfer of interest and attention over to a complex system of acts and objects. Want, effort, skill and satisfaction stand in the closest relations to one another. The ultimate aim and the urgent concern of the moment are identical; memory of the past and hope for the future meet and are lost in the stress of the present problem; tools, implements, weapons are not mechanical and objective means, but are part of the present activity, organic parts of personal skill and effort. The land is not a means to a result but an intimate and fused portion of life—a matter not of objective inspection and analysis, but of affectionate and sympathetic regard. The making of weapons is felt as a part of the exciting use of them. Plants and animals are not ‘things,’ but are factors in the display of energy and form the contents of most intense satisfactions. The ‘animism’ of primitive mind is a necessary expression of the immediacy of relation existing between want, overt activity, that which affords satisfaction and the attained satisfaction itself. Only when things are treated simply as *means*, are marked off and held off against remote ends, do they become ‘objects.’

Such immediacy of interest, attention and deed is the essential trait of the nomad hunter. He has no cultivated plants, no system of appliances and tending and regulating plants and animals; he does not even anticipate the future by drying meat. When food is abundant, he gorges himself, but does not save. His habitation is a temporary improvised hut. In the interior, he does not even save skins for clothes in the cold of winter, but cooks them with the rest of the carcass. Generally even by the water he has no permanent boats, but makes one of bark when and as he needs it. He has no tools or equipment except those actually in use at the moment of getting or using food—weapons of the chase and war. Even set traps and nets which work for the savage are practically unknown. He catches beast, bird and fish with his own hands when he does not use club or spear; and if he uses nets he is himself personally concerned in their use.

Now such facts as these are usually given a purely negative interpretation. They are used as proofs of the incapacities of the savage. But in fact they are parts of a very positive psychosis, which taken in itself and not merely measured against something else, requires and exhibits highly specialized skill and affords intense satisfactions—psychical and social satisfactions, not merely sensuous indulgences. The savage's repugnance to what we term a higher plane of life is not due to stupidity or dullness or apathy—or to any other merely negative qualities—such traits are a later development and fit the individual only too readily for exploitation as a tool by 'superior races.' His aversion is due to the fact that in the new occupations he does not have so clear or so intense a sphere for the display of intellectual and practical skill, or such opportunity for a dramatic play of emotion. Consciousness, even if superficial, is maintained at a higher intensity.¹

The hunting life is of necessity one of great emotional interest, and of adequate demand for acquiring and using highly specialized skills of sense, movement, ingenuity, strategy and combat. It is hardly necessary to argue the first point. Game and sport are still words which mean the most intense immediate play of the emotions, running their entire gamut. And these terms still are applied most liberally and most appropriately to hunting. The transferred application of the hunting language to pursuit of truth, plot interest, business adventure and speculation, to all intense and active forms of amusement, to gambling and the 'sporting life,' evidences how deeply imbedded in later consciousness is the hunting pattern or schema.²

The interest of the game, the alternate suspense and movement, the strained and alert attention to stimuli always changing, always demanding graceful, prompt, strategic and forceful response; the play of emotions along the scale of want, effort,

¹ For good statements by competent authorities of the Australian's aversion to agriculture, etc., see Hodgkinson, 'Australia, from Port Macquarie to Moreton Bay,' p. 243; and Grey, 'Two Expeditions,' etc., II., p. 279.

² See Thomas' 'The Gaming Instinct,' *American Journal of Sociology*, Vol. VI., p. 750. I am indebted to Dr. Thomas (through personal conversation as well as from his articles) for not only specific suggestions, but for the point of view here presented to such an extent that this article is virtually a joint contribution.

success or failure—this is the very type, psychically speaking, of the drama. The breathless interest with which we hang upon the movement of play or novel are reflexes of the mental attitudes evolved in the hunting vocation.

The savage loses nothing in enjoyment of the drama because it means life or death to him.¹ The emotional interest in the game itself is moreover immensely reinforced and deepened by its social accompaniments. Skill and success mean applause and admiration; it means the possibility of lavish generosity—the quality that wins all. Rivalry and emulation and vanity all quicken and feed it. It means sexual admiration and conquests—more wives or more elopements. It means, if persistent, the ultimate selection of the individual for all tribal positions of dignity and authority.

But perhaps the most conclusive evidence of the emotional satisfactions involved is the fact that the men reserve the hunting occupation to themselves, and give to the women everything that has to do with the vegetable side of existence (where the passive subject matter does not arouse the dramatic play), and all activity of every sort that involves the more remote adaptation of means to ends—and hence, drudgery.²

The same sort of evidence is found in the fact that, with change to agricultural life, other than hunting types of action are (if women do not suffice) handed over to slaves, and the energy and skill acquired go into the game of war. This also explains the apparent contradiction in the psychic retrogression of the mass with some advances in civilization. The gain is found in the freed activities of the few, and in the cumulation of the objective instrumentalities of social life, and in the final development, under the discipline of subjection, of new modes of interest having to do with remoter ends—considerations, however, which are psychologically realized by the mass only at much later periods.

¹ Though some writers even say that the savage's interest in the game of hunting is so great that he hunts for the excitement rather than for food. See Lumholtz, 'Among Cannibals,' p 161 and p. 191

² This collateral development of a different mental pattern in women is a matter of the greatest significance, in itself, in its relation to subsequent developments and in relation to present mental interests.

As to the high degree of skill, practical and intellectual, stimulated and created by the hunting occupation, the case is equally clear—provided, that is, we bear in mind the types of skill appropriate to the immediate adjustments required, and do not look for qualities irrelevant because useless in such a situation.

No one has ever called a purely hunting race dull, apathetic or stupid. Much has been written regarding the aversion of savages to higher resources of civilization—their refusal to adopt iron tools or weapons, for example, and their sodden absorption in routine habits. None of this applies to the Australian or any other *pure* hunting type. Their attention is mobile and fluid as is their life; they are eager to the point of greed for anything which will fit into their dramatic situations so as to intensify skill and increase emotion. Here again the apparent discrepancies strengthen the case. It is when the native is forced into an alien use of the new resources, instead of adapting them to his own ends, that his workmanship, skill and artistic taste uniformly degenerate.

Competent testimony is unanimous as to the quickness and accuracy of apprehension evinced by the natives in coming in contact even for the first time with complicated constructive devices of civilized man, provided only these appliances have a direct or immediate action-index. One of the commonest remarks of travelers, hardly prepossessed in favor of the savage, is their superiority in keenness, alertness and a sort of intelligent good humor to the average English rustic. The accuracy, quickness and minuteness of perception of eye, ear and smell are no barren accumulation of meaningless sense detail as Spencer would have it; they are the cultivation to the highest point of skill and emotional availability of the instrumentalities and modes of a dramatic life. The same applies to the native's interest in hard and sustained labor, to his patience and perseverance as well as to his gracefulness and dexterity of movement—the latter extending to fingers and toes to an extent which makes even skilled Europeans awkward and clumsy. The usual denial of power of continued hard work, of patience and of endurance to the savage is based once more upon trying him by a foreign standard—interest in ends which involve a long series of means

detached from all problems of purely personal adjustment. Patience and persistence and long-maintained effort the savage does show when they come within the scope of that immediate contest situation with reference to which his mental pattern is formed.

I hardly need say, I suppose, that in saying these things I have no desire to idealize savage intelligence and volition. The savage paid for highly specialized skill in all matters of personal adjustment, by incapacity in all that is impersonal, that is to say, remote, generalized, objectified, abstracted. But my point is that we understand their incapacities only by seeing them as the obverse side of positively organized developments; and, still more, that it is only by viewing them primarily in their positive aspect that we grasp the genetic significance of savage mind for the long and tortuous process of mental development, and secure from its consideration assistance in comprehending the structure of present mind.

I come now to a brief consideration of the second main point—the extent to which this psychic pattern is carried over into all the relations of life, and becomes emotionally an assimilating medium. First, take art. The art of the Australian is not constructive, not architectonic, not graphic, but dramatic and mimetic.¹ Every writer who has direct knowledge of the Australian corroborees, whether occasional and secular, or state and ceremonial, testifies to the remarkable interest shown in dramatic representation. The reproduction by dances, of the movements and behavior of the animals of the chase is startling. Great humor is also shown in adapting and reproducing recent events and personal traits. These performances are attended with high emotional attacks; and all the accompaniments of decoration, song, music, spectators' shouts, etc., are designed to revive the feelings appropriate to the immediate conflict-situations which mean so much to the savage. Novelty is at a distinct premium; old songs are discarded; one of the chief interests at an intertribal friendly meeting is learning new dance-songs;

¹ There are of course pictures, but comparatively speaking, few and crude. Even the carvings, if originally pictorial, have mostly lost that quality, and become conventional.

and acquisition of a new one is often sufficient motive for invitation to a general meeting.

The ceremonial corroborees are of course more than forms of art.¹ We have in them the sole exception to the principle that the activities of the hunter are immediate. Here they are weighted with a highly complicated structure of elaborated traditional rites—elaborated and complicated almost beyond belief.² But it is an exception which proves the rule. This apparatus of traditionary agencies has no reference to either practical or intellectual control, it gets nowhere objectively. Its effect is just to reinstate the emotional excitations of the food conflict-situations; and particularly to frame in the young the psychic disposition which will make them thoroughly interested in the necessary performances.³

It is a natural transition to religion. Totemism and the abundance of plant and animal myths (especially the latter) and the paucity of cosmic and cosmogonic myth testify to the centering of attention upon the content of the combat, or hunting situation. It would be absurd to attempt in a parenthesis an explanation of totemism, but certainly any explanation is radically defective which does not make much of the implication of tribe and animal in the same emotional situation. Hunter and hunted are the factors of a single tension; the mental situation cannot be defined except in terms of both. If animals get away, it is surely because they try; and if they are caught it is surely because after all they are not totally averse—they are friendly. And they seal their friendliness by sharing in one of the most intense satisfactions of life—savory food to the hungry. They are, as a matter of fact, co-partners in the life of the group. Why then should they not be represented as of close kin? In any case, attention and interest center in animals more persistently than in

¹ It is, of course, a historic fact that the actual origin of dramatic art (through the Greeks) is in mimetic dances of a festival and ceremonial sort.

² The best account is of course Spencer and Gillen. Certain ceremonies take weeks.

³ Not, of course, that all these ceremonies are initiatory in character; on the contrary, many are 'magical,' intended to promote the productivity of their chief food-supplies. But even these were conducted in dramatic fashion, and in such way as to reproduce the emotional disposition involved in the actual occupational life.

anything else; and they afford the content of whatever concentrated intellectual activity goes on. The food taboos, with their supernatural sanctions, certainly create tensions, or re-instate conflict-situations, in the mind; and thus serve to keep alive in consciousness values which otherwise would be more nearly relegated to the mechanically habitual, or become sensuous, not idealized or emotionalized.

I turn now to matters of death and sickness, their cause, and cure, or, if cure is hopeless, their remedy by expiation. Here the assimilation to the psychosis of the hunting activity is obvious. Sickness and death from sickness are uniformly treated as the results of attacks of other persons, who with secret and strange weapons are hunting their victim to his death. And the remedy is to hunt the hunter, to get the aid of that wonderful pursuer and tracker, the medicine man, who by superior ability runs down the guilty party, or with great skill hunts out the deadly missile or poison lodged in the frame of his victim.

If death ensues, then we have the devices for tracking and locating the guilty party. And then comes actual conflict, actual man-hunting. Death can be avenged only by the ordeal of battle—and here we have the explanation of the wars and war-like performances of which so much has been made. It is, however, now generally admitted that the chief object of these war-like meetings is to reinstate the emotion of conflict rather than to kill. They are, so to speak, psychological duels on a large scale—as one observer says, they are ‘fights with a maximum of noise, boast, outward show of courage and a minimum of casualties.’¹ But the manouvering, throwing and dodging that take place are a positive dramatic exercise in the utilities of their occupational pursuits.

Finally, as to marriage, and the relations between the sexes. What was said concerning the impossibility of an adequate account of totemism applies with greater force to the problem of the system of group relationships which determine marital possibilities. It is clear, however, that the system of injunctions and restrictions serves to develop a scheme of inhibitions and intensified stimuli which makes sex-satisfaction a matter

¹ Horn, ‘Expedition,’ Vol. IV., p. 36.

of pursuit, conflict, victory and trophy over again. There is neither complete absence of inhibition, which, involving little personal adjustment, does not bring the sexual sensations into the sphere of emotion as such; nor is there a system of voluntary agreement and affection, which is possible only with a highly developed method of intellectual control, and large outlooks upon a long future. There is just the ratio between freedom and restraint that develops the dramatic instinct, and gives courtship and the possession of women all the emotional joys of the hunt—personal display, rivalry, enough exercise of force to stimulate the organism; and the emotion of prowess joined to the physical sensations of indulgence. Here, as elsewhere in the hunting psychosis, novelty is at a premium, for the mind is dependent upon a present or immediate stimulus to get activity going. It requires no deep scientific analysis to inform us that sex-relations are still largely in the dramatized stage; and the play of emotion which accompanies the enacting of the successive stages of the drama gives way to genuine affection and intelligent foresight only slowly through great modifications of the whole educative and economic environment. Recent writers, I think, in their interest on the institutional side of marriage (for we are going through a period of reading back Aryan legal relationships just as we formerly read back Aryan theogonies and mythologies) have overlooked the tremendous importance of the immediate play of psychic factors congruous to hunting as such.¹

In conclusion, let me point out that the adjustment of habits to ends, through the medium of a problematic, doubtful, precarious situation, is the structural form upon which present intelligence and emotion are built. It remains the ground-pattern. The further problem of genetic psychology is then to show how the purely immediate personal adjustment of habit to direct satisfaction, in the savage, became transformed through the introduction of impersonal, generalized objective instrumentalities and ends; how it ceased to be immediate and became loaded

¹ For a statement doing justice to the psycho-physic factors involved, see Thomas, *Der Ursprung der Exogamie*, *Zeitschrift für Socialwissenschaft*, Bd. V., 1.

and surcharged with a content which forced personal want, initiative, effort and satisfaction further and further apart, putting all kinds of social divisions of labor, intermediate agencies and objective contents between them. This is the problem of the formation of mental patterns appropriate to agricultural, military, professional and technological and trade pursuits, and the reconstruction and overlaying of the original hunting schema.

But by these various agencies we have not so much destroyed or left behind the hunting structural arrangement of mind, as we have set free its constitutive psycho-physic factors so as to make them available and interesting in all kinds of objective and idealized pursuits—the hunt for truth, beauty, virtue, wealth, social well-being, and even of heaven and of God.